

# Service Area Plan

## Department of Social Services

### Emergency and Energy Assistance (49103)

## Service Area Background Information

### Service Area Description

The Emergency and Energy Assistance program service area is a core component of the Commonwealth's safety net for low-income and at-risk Virginians. This service area is responsible for the operation of the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) and the Other Needs Assistance Program (ONA). The Energy Assistance program helps low-income individuals and families meet their immediate and often emergent home energy needs. The program is 100 percent funded from the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant and serves less than half the total number of eligible households in Virginia. Among those households served, the benefit amount typically covers 25 percent of the household's energy costs for that season. With fixed resources, the greater the number of households served, the lower the percentage of overall energy costs the program can cover. The EAP consists of four components: Fuel Assistance, Crisis Assistance, Cooling Assistance and Weatherization Assistance. Fuel Assistance provides benefits to aid households in paying the cost of heating their homes. Crisis Assistance helps households address energy-related emergencies. Cooling Assistance supports households in purchasing or repairing cooling equipment and the payment of electric bills during the summer months. Local departments of social services perform the eligibility determination for the EAP and payments are made directly to vendors in most cases.

The Weatherization Assistance Program provides weatherization services to low-income families and is administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) through contracts with local community-based organizations. By state statute, DHCD receives 15 percent of the LIHEAP block grant to implement this program.

The Other Needs Assistance Program (ONA), executed by federal disaster declaration, provides financial assistance to eligible disaster victims to meet necessary and serious needs such as medical/dental, funeral, transportation, and personal property expenses; miscellaneous post-disaster purchases; and group flood insurance premiums. The ONA program is 75 percent federally funded and jointly administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Payments to eligibility ONA applicants are written by the Commonwealth. The program is administered on a disaster by disaster basis, and no appropriation is included in the state budget.

### Service Area Alignment to Missio

These programs assist Virginians in triumphing over poverty and shaping strong futures for themselves, their families and their communities. These programs target low-income individuals and those significantly affected by disasters, assisting each in meeting their basic human needs and rebuilding their lives. This assistance often helps avoid the unfortunate trade-off many low-income families make between housing, food and medicine.

### Service Area Statutory Authority

The Virginia Energy Assistance Program was established in accordance with the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program Act (LIHEAP) of 1981 (Title XXVI of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Public Law 97-35, as amended), the Code of Virginia 63.2 and 63.2-805 and Chapter 680 and Chapter 685 of the Administrative Code of Virginia.

The Other Needs Assistance Program was established in the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, amending Section 408 of the Stafford Act, 42 U.S.C. 5174. Federal regulations can be found at 44 CFR, 206.101-111.

The state statutory authority resides in the Code of Virginia, Title 44, Section 44.146.14 to 44-146.28.

### Service Area Customer Base

Customer(s)	Served	Potential
Low income individuals and families (households)	150,000	254,000

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#### **Anticipated Changes In Service Area Customer Bas**

From 2000 to 2003 (most recent Census data), the number of Virginians living in poverty increased 28% with 740,000 Virginians now living below the federal poverty threshold. With an increasing number of individuals and families living in poverty in Virginia and the dramatic increases in home energy costs being felt among all Virginians, the Department predicts an increase in the total number of households served. This increase in the customer base will lead to a decrease in the benefit amount because of fixed resources.

#### **Service Area Partners**

**Community Action Agencies**

**Federal Emergency Management Agency**

**Local Departments of Social Services**

**State agencies**

**Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities (VISSTA)**

#### **Service Area Products and Services**

- Support of organizations serving communities
- Economic Assistance to low income families/individuals or nutrition, child care, health care eligibility, and financial assistance to low income families/individuals
- Services that promote sufficiency

#### **Factors Impacting Service Area Products and Services**

Increases in fuel costs and in the number of individuals living in poverty make the service more expensive while increasing the customer base. This experience has bourn out over the last three years with steadily increasing caseloads in the EAP as well as other benefit programs targeting low-income individuals and families. The increased customer base results in more work for local departments of social services which receive a fixed allocation (by state regulation) for eligibility determination services. Additionally, federal funding levels are tenuous given the competing demands of the war in Iraq, Medicare and Medicaid. Finally, the social services system – state and local departments of social services – will be completing a business process re-engineering initiative in August 2005. This initiative is designed to map the current business processes, recommend radical change to the processes and business model in order to improve client service and efficiency, and post a roadmap for implementation. The results of this initiative will likely change the manner in which the Energy Assistance Program is implemented.

#### **Anticipated Changes To Service Area Products and Service**

No anticipated changes until the recommendations of the business process reengineering initiative are complete.

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#### Service Area Financial Summary

The predominant source of funding for the Energy Assistance Program is the federal LIHEAP block grant. The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families awards the LIHEAP block grant annually to States and Indian tribes. With the exception of the \$500,000 state fund appropriation received last winter, the Energy Assistance program is 100% federally funded. Funds for the LIHEAP grant are disbursed as follows: fifteen percent is allocated for the Weatherization Assistance Program, ten percent is allocated for State and Local program administration with the remaining funds used to provide direct services and benefits to eligible low income households.

	<u>Fiscal Year 2007</u>		<u>Fiscal Year 2008</u>	
	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
<b>Base Budget</b>	\$0	\$35,500,000	\$0	\$35,500,000
<b>Changes To Base</b>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>SERVICE AREA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$35,500,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$35,500,000</b>

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**Service Area Objectives, Measures, and Strategies**

**Objective 49103.01**

***Improve access to the Energy Assistance Program***

There are many individuals and families in need of and eligible for services provided through Virginia's Energy Assistance Programs. Improving awareness and increasing access to services will assist in efforts to serve these households, particularly those with high energy burdens. By removing barriers to the application process, the Commonwealth can increase and improve access to services while potentially reducing the workload for local departments of social services.

**This Objective Supports the Following Agency Goals:**

- Enhance the independence, well-being and personal responsibility of customers  
( Conducting outreach and providing assistance to households in meeting their home energy needs, particularly those with the lowest incomes that pay a high portion of household for home energy is mandated in the LIHEAP federal statute section 2605. (b) (1) (A). This objective is also directly aligned with Objective 1.3, Improve and Increase Access to High Quality Services and Support. The objective also supports the Council on Virginia's Future long term objectives to "[i]nspire and support Virginians toward health lives and strong, resilient families" by helping meet low-income Virginians basic human needs and freeing up scarce resources to be focused on nutrition and medical services)

**This Objective Has The Following Measure(s):**

● **Measure 49103.01.01**

***The total households pre-approved for the Fuel Assistance Program***

**Measure Type:** Output

**Measure Frequency:** Annually

**Measure Baseline:** 14,207

**Measure Target:** 2 percent in each fiscal year 2007 through 2008

**Measure Source and Calculation:**

Source: The Energy Assistance System (eligibility system)

Calculation: Total number of households pre-approved for Fuel Assistance. The Energy Assistance components, Fuel, Crisis and Cooling Assistance are not on-going programs but rather programs with specific annual application periods and specific start and end dates.

● **Measure 49103.01.02**

***The total households served for Energy Assistance Programs***

**Measure Type:** Output

**Measure Frequency:** Annually

**Measure Baseline:** 143,979

**Measure Target:** 2 percent in each fiscal year 2007 through 2008

**Measure Source and Calculation:**

Source: The Energy Assistance System (eligibility system)

Calculation: Total number of households served by Energy Assistance Programs. The Energy Assistance components, Fuel, Crisis and Cooling Assistance are not on-going programs but rather programs with specific annual application periods and specific start and end dates.

**Objective 49103.01 Has the Following Strategies:**

- Include cooling cases in the fuel pre-approval process.
- Increase address data entry consistency between Energy and Food Stamp cases.

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- Web based application process for Energy Assistance programs by FY 2007.
- Increase legacy case number consistency between Energy and Food Stamp cases.
- Develop additional methods or partnerships designed to increase participation in pre-approval process.